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Maine L.E.A.A. Funds (National Communication Network for the elimination of violence against women, April 1977)

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*Washington,
D.C.*

The Task Force on Abused Women is part of the Women's Legal Defense Fund, Washington, D.C., and is currently working on several projects.

We are sponsoring seminars for local judges to sensitize them to the legal position and specific needs of battered women. We are also writing a legal manual for domestic relations attorneys to encourage them to handle more spousal violence cases. Eventually we hope that in return for workshops and the manual these attorneys will agree to handle a certain number of battered women cases for free.

We are also beginning to look into both local and national legislation. Although we consider ourselves primarily a local group, our location in D.C. gives us a lot of opportunity to influence national as well as local legislation. We would really like the input of other battered women's advocacy groups in terms of what national legislation should look like, what should be avoided, etc. Currently, Lindy Boggs is considering writing a "money bill" and we would like to know what other groups think should be included in this.

In addition to these activities, we are also starting support groups and are planning,

and seeking funds for, a shelter for battered women in Washington.

The Task Force can be reached by writing to: Task Force on Abused Women, Women's Legal Defense Fund, 1424 16th St. NW, Suite 105, Wash., D.C. 20036, 202/232-5293.

Valle Jones

*Task Force on Abused Women
Washington, D.C.*

Maine - L.E.A. Funds

Last January (1976) three of us decided to write a grant requesting Federal funding for a shelter. We chose the Law Enforcement Assistance Agency for a couple of reasons: the police are virtually the only social agent that deals continuously with domestic disputes, and we viewed police support and involvement as crucial to successful operation of a shelter. In addition, since we were bent on defining wife abuse as a social rather than an individual problem, we decided at the outset to make a bid for public money. It distressed us that existing shelters in America are often run on a shoestring, with only tenuous financial commitment from others, and we were determined to find out whether or not the system with a capital S could be tapped for funding. We could have chosen another large Federal agency, such as NIMH, but from the beginning we wanted to steer clear of having the problem identified as a "mental health" one-enter, then, LEAA.

(cont...)

At this point, eleven months later, the project status is as follows. We now have broad based support in the City of Portland - from the City Council to the Police Chief to all the major social service agencies. We also have support from a number of women's groups in the city, and have just been told by the Junior League that they are sending us our first cash contribution. We are incorporated as an independent agency and are in the process of setting up a board of directors. On November 30, 1976, we finally received endorsement from the Maine State LEAA Board; in a couple of weeks our proposal will go to the Regional LEAA Office in Boston and then on to Washington for the final decision. It is, by the way, a discretionary (i.e., Federal) grant rather than a Maine State block grant. We did this to avoid competition with state law enforcement personnel for limited funds. We know this puts us in competition with proposals from all over the country, but nevertheless it has been a useful strategy in terms of gathering support for the project within the State.

Our budget now stands at \$114,000 for the first year and a projected \$94,000 for the second. The shelter will house approximately 20 people total (we had to limit the initial size in order to secure City and State approval) but we anticipate filling up immediately and have held fast to the policy that no woman in danger will be turned away.

Skirmishes about licensing regulations are probably unavoidable. The shelter will have no "program" as such, no rehabilitation, no extensive counseling, no top-heavy professional staff. It will be a self-help facility patterned along the lines of shelters set up in England, with a support staff of paraprofessionals and students. Volunteers will also play a large role - we have been tied from the beginning to a volunteer-run, crisis telephone hotline in Portland. The latter, in fact, provided us with our only hard statistics when we were writing the grant.

We have high hopes that we will eventually receive the money. If we do (and we should know by the end of March, 1977), to our knowledge we will be the first women's refuge in the country fully paid for with public money - a sweet victory, to say the least. And yet far sweeter if it encourages other women to demand serious attention for their concerns from the Federal government.

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Resource Center

The Community Planning Organization (333 Sibley St., St. Paul, Minn., 55101 Room 503, 612/291-8323) has just opened a Battered Women's Resource Center which contains a collection of books, periodicals, legislative material, and audio tapes on the subject of abused women and family violence, including a slide show entitled "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Problem."